

PEACE POSSIBLE IN 1917, SAYS WEDEL

Return of Alsace-Lorraine Was Price Germany Was to Have Paid.

FAILURE IN ERZBERGER

Lloyd George and Ribot Prepared to Go to Rome to Open Parleys.

Special Correspondence to The Sun.
Berlin, Sept. 19.—Count Bothe von Wedel, former German Ambassador at Vienna, has published in a Hamburg paper a sensational article in which he claims that peace was possible in 1917 if the German Government had been willing to restore Alsace-Lorraine to France. He further claims that Lloyd George at that time was ready to negotiate peace.

The British Premier and Ribot, the French Minister, had made preparations to go to Rome, where negotiations were to be begun, writes the Count. Austria at that time was ready to cede territory to Italy and add Galicia to an independent Poland, says Count von Wedel. All this was spoiled by indiscretions committed by Matthias Erzberger, the present Vice-Chancellor of Germany.

The contents of Czernin's confidential note became known at Paris and revived the hopes of Lloyd George and the French Cabinet. Even plans for a separate peace with Austria were then shadowed, inasmuch as Austria's and also Germany's collapse was considered imminent. In denying the truth of a statement which implied Erzberger had suffered the backbone of Emperor Charles and his ministry by his visit to Vienna, Count von Wedel writes:

"Soon after the revolution in Petrograd in March, 1917, the Powers in charge at Vienna had an attack of nerves," Count Czernin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, submitted a confidential report to Emperor Charles on April 12. This report was to be sent to German headquarters. It was taken to Homburg by Count Ledochowski. It was the report's purpose to induce Germany to accept defeat and to cede territory to France. Emperor Charles, accompanied by Count Czernin, went to Homburg and proposed to Emperor William and his military advisers that Germany should give up Alsace-Lorraine. France, as Austria was willing to cede territory and to give up Galicia to Poland.

Austrian Report Failed.
The Austrian report did not accomplish the desired result at German headquarters because it was overdrawn and exaggerated the perils of the situation. Military successes achieved during the following weeks restored confidence at Vienna, at least to a certain extent.

Bethmann-Hollweg, then Chancellor, sent having sent Erzberger to Vienna at that time "in order to discuss the Austrian Emperor's backbone," but, says Count von Wedel, Erzberger made several trips to Vienna on his own responsibility. Before departing he would visit the Foreign Office at Berlin, have a talk with Ministers of State and then create the impression in his talks with foreign rulers that he was an emissary of the German Government. Erzberger reported back to Berlin that Emperor Charles had told him that peace proposals would have to be made by the Central Powers within three or four months. In the meantime plan would have to be kept secret. About three months later the German Reichstag adopted its resolution for a conference peace without annexations.

"At that time it was known that Erzberger knew something about Count Czernin's confidential report," continues Count von Wedel. "Later on he became known that Erzberger had had a copy of Czernin's report. An investigation was undertaken at Vienna to find out how Erzberger had obtained the report. The investigation showed that he had not been any breach of confidence on the part of any Austrian official, but that Erzberger had obtained the report in Austria (from the Emperor himself)."

Lloyd George Shaky.

"Since then we have it from a French diplomat who let it out at Vienna, that there was a time in 1917 when Lloyd George, who had the deciding vote as to peace or war, had become shaky as a result of the submarine war and had been receptive as to a negotiated peace. Lloyd George and Ribot, the French Minister, had been ready to leave for Rome, where the question of beginning negotiations was to be decided. The trip had been abandoned as soon as the contents of the Czernin report became known at Paris."

"The same French diplomat is also credited with the statement that the Czernin report had become known at Paris and created immense surprise in official circles. The Entente leaders became convinced that Austria was finished and that Germany's position perhaps was just as bad. From then on the Entente gave up every idea of a peace of conciliation, because they were convinced of having won the war. Even the thought of a separate peace with Austria was dropped. Every week and every month news announcing Austria's utter collapse was expected at Paris. They could not explain the forceful offensives inaugurated by Germany in the fall of 1917 and in the spring of 1918, in view of the Czernin report."

"In order to remove any possible misunderstandings I must be permitted to admit a sort of indiscretion. Count Czernin told me he knew of no negotiations on the part of Erzberger to prevent premature peace overtures on the part of Austria, for the simple reason that such overtures had never been contemplated. He, Czernin, had been visited by Erzberger and had talked with him on the general situation. He, Czernin, had expressed his doubts as to the effects of the submarine war, while Erzberger had been more hopeful in this respect."

"Count Czernin wrote me he had summoned Erzberger to Vienna as soon as he, Czernin, heard of the leak caused by Erzberger's indiscretion. He had asked Erzberger to defend his course by giving out the contents of the confidential report. Erzberger was shocked when told that tremendous results his indiscretion had brought about, Erzberger confessed his guilt."

"This shows," concludes Count von Wedel, "that Erzberger prevented the consummation of an honorable peace, honorable for Germany and Austria, by his indefensible folly. Instead of being a savior of the Central Empire, as he once has been claiming to have stiffened the Austrian Emperor's backbone at a critical moment, he is responsible for the humiliating defeat of the German"

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